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AUTHOR Galvin, Patrick
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ABSTRACT

This case study considers why community members of two rural New York School districts reacted so strongly against a referendum for school district reorganization in February 1983. State and local school officials introduced into this reorganization effort a unique plan designed to achieve community support for the merger. Rather than have the State conduct the merger feasibility study, a Community Participation Plan organized community members into committees, each of which studied one aspect of the proposed reorganization. Despite unanimous support of all 10 community based committees, citizens overwhelmingly rejected the referendum. Study results suggest that community members were neither convinced that their school districts were inadequate nor that reorganizing would lead to important new opportunities for large numbers of students. The decision to reject reorganization appears to have had less to do with issues of community identity and more to do with costs and benefits of those opportunities. Contrary to state expectations, the more the community discussed and debated, the less possible it became for agreement to be reached. Two conclusions emerged: because they are so divisive, reorganizations should be handled quickly with a minimum of discussion and citizen involvement; or, the case for reorganization is not so compelling as its advocates believe, and the state should pursue a more balanced role in improving rural educational opportunities. (NEC)

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Department of Education
New York State College of Agriculture & Life Sciences at
Cornell University

School District Reorganization:
A Case Study of the Community
Participation Approach*

by
Patrick Galvin

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Organizational Alternatives for Small-Rural Schools
In New York State*

Investigators:

David H. Monk
Emil J. Haller
Joe P. Bail

September 1986



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page
Number

Introduction	1
Brief Histories of the Communities	6
Arcadia Community	
New Hope Community	
Brief Description of the School Districts	9
Arcadia	
New Hope	
History of the Reorganization Effort/1982-83	12
Past Reorganization Efforts	
Origins of Most Recent Reorganization Attempt	
The Plan for Reorganization	
Implementing the Plan	
The Findings of the Committees	
The Concerned Citizens	
Community View's of the Schools and Reorganization	30
Profiles of the Teachers	36
Teachers Characteristics	
Teacher Course Load	
Curriculum	47
Community Identity and School District Reorganization	57
Views of Community Life	
Views of Political Life	
Demographics	
The County	
The School Districts	
Student Enrollment	
Age Characteristics of Communities	
Mobility Characteristics	
Income Characteristics	
Areas of Employment	
District Wealth Characteristics	
The Economic and Industrial Base	71
The Industrial History of the Area	
Arcadia	
New Hope	
Conclusion	78

INTRODUCTION

...this is actually a pilot program, a brand new way to go about consolidation. It is being watched all over the State and will provide an enormous amount of useful information for the future. Its impact on other districts that might be considering consolidation will be tremendous. (Randolph, November 17, 1982)

New York State's Department of Education has, for the last several decades, attempted to reduce the number, and increase the size of its constituent school districts. Larger districts are alleged by the State to provide students with a greater number of educational opportunities in a more efficient manner than are smaller school districts. Despite the promise of these benefits, in recent years community members throughout the State have rejected school district reorganization attempts more often than they have accepted them.

The reluctance of local community members to accept reorganization has led educational planners to consider the change process. There are two classic perspectives on educational change. The "human relations" tradition focuses on the procedures for achieving change. This strategy studies the role of leadership, especially in terms of promoting participation in the change process. The other tradition attempts to identify incentives which are influential in moving decision makers towards accepting the proposed changes; it is

called social policy analysis (Bennis, Benne, & Chin, 1969; Herriott & Gross, 1979; Stein, Bruno & Miller, 1973).

The State Education Department has recently begun to emphasize community participation as part of its effort to achieve school district reorganization. The plan involves community members in studying the feasibility of school district reorganization, studies which has traditionally been conducted by State officials. The strategy assumes that if community members are involved in the decisions of planning change, they will more readily accept the change. Incentive aid is used similarly as a means of achieving change, but it is used as a way of providing a "bonus" to those districts where community members decide to accept reorganization. These bonuses are usually introduced in the form of temporarily increased operating and building aid for the districts.

These ideas for facilitating school district reorganization were recently combined in an attempted school district reorganization in New York State. Over 150 community members were recruited to make an extensive study about the need for, and the likely benefits of this school district reorganization. If the communities accepted reorganization, the Department of Education offered substantial, albeit temporary, increases in the districts' operating and building aid as a way of defraying the costs of the merger. In effect, if community members accepted reorganization, the aid was sufficient to reduce local taxes in absolute dollars.

This reorganization effort, between the New Hope and Arcadia school districts, had special significance to the State Education Department. According to the State's Chief of the Bureau of School District Organization, this merger proposal was being watched at the State level, due to its unique community-involvement approach. State education officials were interested in whether an approach in which the district's residents did their own study of consolidation, rather than accept a State conducted study, would generate approval. The State Assemblyman, speaking to the school boards at that time, said:

An awful lot of people are looking at this one merger...If a trend becomes apparent Statewide for communities to decide on their own consolidation, then the State will begin making dramatic changes in the incentive aid formula. (Westfield News, 2/7/83)

The Chief of the Bureau of School District Organization Stated that this merger proposal "had everything going for it - good leadership, a good program, and good support of the boards, but it didn't come about." (Westfield News, 2/2/83)

Upon superficial examination of the facts, it is hard to understand why these communities rejected the merger proposition. The State Department of Education had guaranteed the communities substantial financial aid if they would reorganize into a single school district. The findings of the ten community-based research committees, which will be discussed in detail later in this case study, all recommended the merger. These local committees unanimously concluded that the reorganization would provide

better and less expensive education for the students. On voting day, however, the people came out in opposition to the merger. One New Hope School Board member said that the people who opposed the consolidation (known as the Concerned Citizens) "brought people in by wheelchair to vote against the reorganization referendum."

Much of what follows is an attempt to answer the following question: Why did the community members of the two school districts, New Hope and Arcadia, react so negatively to the proposition of school district reorganization? Very often the explanation of "community identity" was raised as an issue around which community members could rally against the reorganization referendum. Interviews with community members, parents, students, teachers and school administrators found more substantive issues being debated as reasons for rejecting or accepting the proposal for school district reorganization. Perhaps most fundamentally, community members were uncertain about the consequences of accepting reorganization, and what it would mean for the future. It was unclear, for example, if reorganization would mean the construction of a new building or simply the renovation of old ones. It was also unclear who was most likely to benefit from the changes. While many parents and community members acknowledged the advantages of reorganization, many argued that the benefits were not likely to affect their child, or simply that they did not have a child in the school. Furthermore, many citizens of New Hope, the larger of the two

districts, believed that the merger could only mean the assumption of Arcadia's debts and problems.

The proposition of reorganization was being presented as an issue of social "good"; a proposition for the benefit of school children. It appears, however, that individuals were deciding the merits of the proposition based on their own self-interests. Older residents, who had paid taxes for years and sent their children through the schools, were reluctant to accept the risks and uncertainties associated with a reorganized district. Professional families, concerned about the quality of education in terms of future educational opportunities for their children, were in favor of the reorganization. Long-term residents were concerned about the cost of running the district once State incentive aid disappeared.

This case study examines the community members' perspectives on the reorganization effort that took place in 1983. The study is organized into four parts. The first section introduces the communities and reviews the history of the reorganization effort. This section details the development of the merger proposal and aspirations of its organizers. The following sections attempt to delve more deeply into the reasons people rejected the referendum. These parts of the study pay special attention to the views of area residents about their schools and community. The concluding section returns more directly to issues of risk and uncertainty as it applies the questions about reorganization.

BRIEF HISTORIES OF THE COMMUNITIES

Arcadia and New Hope are two neighboring school districts in New York, about an hour south of Brunswick (a large city). Each district is named after the largest of the villages in the district. New Hope is the larger of the two school districts, with 125 square miles containing 4176 people; the village is about 1200 people. The New Hope School District enrolled 856 students. Arcadia is smaller with 89 square miles and 2625 people. The population of the village of Arcadia is about 800 and the student enrollment in the district was 456. (1980 census)

According to Ted Botsmore, co-chairman of the recent centennial celebration in New Hope, the population of the villages has not changed much over the last 100 years, and is not expected to grow much in the future.

The area is a rural mountainous wilderness, and lacks good farmland; only 10 percent of the residents are farmers. Appleville, a neighboring village less than seven miles from either New Hope or Arcadia, is a popular winter and summer resort area and has the markings of a rural success story. Years ago the community supported the idea of developing a ski resort. According to local residents, people now travel from as far away as New York City and Ohio to spend a weekend skiing. The town has capitalized on these opportunities and sports an Octoberfest during the leaf-peeping season that draws thousands of people for

the weekend. The hotels, restaurants, boutiques, bars and new houses are speak of growth and success that has eluded New Hope and Arcadia.

Arcadia COMMUNITY

The village of Arcadia sits close to the main road, a two-lane highway the connects Arcadia with New Hope. The closest large town is just ten miles to the South. There are two other large urban centers in this area which are over 30 minutes drive for shoppers and workers who commute.

The homes in Arcadia are mostly older two-story houses set between the school, county court house, fair grounds, and churches. There is very little evidence of newer homes being built. On the outskirts of town, a mobile home court includes a mixture of newer and older units.

There are a number of businesses that are easily seen from the road: a GM dealership, several gasoline stations, a funeral home, lumber yards and several small trade stores. These establishments each appear in good repair, and attract a steady stream of customers.

Perhaps the most salient features of the town are the county court house and fairgrounds. According to one long-time resident, "The court house was moved to Arcadia during the 1930's so as to be more centrally located. Appleville had been the previous site." New Hope was one of the communities that attempted unsuccessfully to win support for the seat.

The county fairgrounds are just a short city block from the court house; they sit close to the main road, as does the entire village. The county fair, held in early July, attracts large numbers of people to Arcadia.

NEW HOPE COMMUNITY

As previously mentioned, New Hope and Arcadia are connected by a good two-lane highway running up the flat of the valley. The village of New Hope is settled in the foothills above the valley, and several streams cut deep ravines through the village. New Hope is larger than Arcadia, and sprawls a bit from the main road; the streets of the village run over and around the hills.

The houses, mostly two-story buildings, are scattered over the terrain in a picturesque way. Many of these houses are older but in very good condition. There is also some evidence of newer homes built on the periphery of village limits. The red brick cobblestone road marks the center of town, where about a dozen small businesses are located, including a restaurant, pharmacy, historical center, and bank. There are several large industrial sites only a block from the center of town. These industries collectively employ over a hundred people, depending on the economy, and crowd the town with commuter traffic.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Before the 1940's, this area of New York was dotted with small, often one-room schools which, during the process of centralization, were reorganized into larger centralized school districts. In this region the process of reorganization was completed by the end of the 1940's. Many of the school districts were affected by the Statewide Master Plan of 1958, which sought to further reorganize these smaller districts. Neither the New Hope nor Arcadia communities agreed to that reorganization effort; both communities also rejected the five or six reorganization efforts that occurred subsequently.

THE Arcadia CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Arcadia was the last of the school districts in the area to centralize, doing so in the year of 1946. The lateness of this reorganization accounts for the fact that it is one of the smaller school districts in the area. The student population is less than 400 in grades K-12. Only a few small common schools were incorporated in the centralization. The present building was constructed in 1924, after a fire burned down the "old" school in 1922. The main structure is a three-story brick building which sits very near the village center. Several mobile units are attached to the side of the building. Classroom space is a serious problem and the school site is so small that no playing field space is immediately available to the students.

The last major renovations took place around the time of the centralization (1949), when an extension was added to the building. This extension included a gym, classrooms and a shop area. The building is essentially unchanged since then and is showing its age. Although recent improvements have been made (a new roof, new insulated windows, and a new furnace), there are still major problems with the plumbing and electrical systems.

One major problem with the school is that it is severely overcrowded. This is most easily demonstrated by the fact that there are about 8977.5 square feet in the school, which according to State requirements of 28 square feet per pupil, is adequate space for 315 students. Arcadia's enrollment of 532 students, in 1983, was 217 over the State's recommendation for the space available. In past years, when enrollments were higher, the problem has been even more acute. The school officials have dealt with these problems by renting a building to house several Elementary classes. The building is less than two miles from the main school site; children are bused to the main school building for lunch and physical education. Further, the school officials have had to add on mobile units to accommodate the students. Currently there are only three such buildings, which are crowded and in poor repair. The other solution to the problem of space has been to plan nine periods into the day. This has resulted in some minor confusion as there are only two minutes between classes. This, we were told, is not enough time to get from one class to the next.

THE NEW HOPE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

The New Hope Central School District was organized July 1, 1946. The centralization included a Union Free School District and 22 other common school districts. These schools were scattered around the area, but included seven village populations. The district was a relatively large one, over 125 square miles. Enrollment in the first year of centralization was 640 students.

There are two school buildings in New Hope, an elementary K-6, and a high school grades 7-12. The elementary school sits prominently on a knoll one block from the center of town. The 3-story brick building was constructed in 1920 and served as the central school until the mid 1950's. The old high school was then extensively remodeled and then, as now, housed the K-6 students.

In 1956 a Junior and Senior High school was constructed on several acres of farm land about a one-half mile from the center of town. The building is a modern, one story design. Structurally the building is in good condition, but needed a new roof and maintenance at the time of the merger proposal. The building sits on about 20 acres of land, which is adequate room for expansion. In fact the building was designed so that it could be easily expanded.

At the time of the reorganization effort, in 1983, the enrollment was about 843, down from 1032 in 1972. The size of a graduating senior class varies but ranges from about 55 to 65

students. Space is not the major issue it is in Arcadia, but the school is overcrowded. At the time of the merger proposal the high school enrolled 371 students, but the space available is rated for only 344 students; the elementary building is rated for 287 students but enrolled 442.

HISTORY OF THE REORGANIZATION EFFORT

PAST REORGANIZATION EFFORTS

As indicated above, the New Hope Central School District was organized in July of 1946. It included the Union Free School District of Springfield and 22 common school districts with small one room school houses. The Arcadia Central School District was also organized in 1946, but only incorporated a few union free school districts in the centralization. The memories of these events are dim, but according to several of the teachers who both grew up and taught in the school district for over 30 years, the centralization took place quickly and without much debate.

Since the centralization, there have been a series of reorganization referendums which the citizens of both these school districts rejected. Neither district accepted the State's 1958 Master Plan which would have combined these two districts with Appleville and Westfield. Another merger referendum, in the early 60's, would have consolidated Arcadia with New Hope and Appleville, but was also rejected. In the following 20 years,

four more propositions for consolidating Arcadia were voted upon, and each time the voters rejected the referendum. Two reorganization attempts involved New Hope and Arcadia alone. One of these took place in the early 1970's; the other and most recent attempt took place in 1983.

According to a life-time resident and experienced school board member, the previous reorganization efforts were not like this last one: "In the past, the boards did not ever get into any details on committees or anything, the board just put out brochures. And both boards tried to get things publicized, they had newspaper articles and stuff, but they never got any going like they did this last time."

ORIGINS OF THE MOST RECENT REORGANIZATION ATTEMPT

The idea for the 1982-83 reorganization proposition began with area school administrators. Both Arcadia and New Hope were struggling with the problems of increasing operation costs, limited space and declining enrollments. According to the president of the New Hope school board:

One of the problems was that a lot of the classes were getting increasingly small at the upper level. It was getting tougher and tougher to justify some of the smaller enrollments...plus, even though the population of the students was falling off we really didn't have any room to move because all of the rooms were taken for all the classes we had to offer. So our Superintendent at the time, Ron Andy, brought up the issue, and also the Superintendent of Arcadia brought up the issue of reorganization one more time.

Working together, the two boards of education discovered that with reorganization the State would increase operating and building aid.

...we figured we could keep taxes low...and possibly we could improve our own buildings if not build more. So, we investigated that and contacted Pat Lore, the BOCES Superintendent, who helped us out quite a bit...and he suggested that we use committees...

The utilization of committees comprised of local citizens in district reorganization efforts is a concept with which Dr. Frank Peters, Representative to the State Educational Commissioner, is familiar. According to Peters, the intent of committee strategy is to generate a community based assessment of school problems. Such a strategy assumes that good leadership is essential to achieve social change, such as school district reorganization. Pat Lore contacted Dr. Peters and asked if he would help organize the community based strategy for achieving school district reorganization.

THE PLAN FOR REORGANIZATION

As we have seen, Arcadia and New Hope had both rejected many previous reorganization proposals. The question before the State, then, was how to overcome the apparent reluctance of the communities' to change. One of the frequent explanations for resistance to change is that those who are asked to change are often never involved with the planning and decisions about the change they face. The literature about community development

describes participation as one means of overcoming that reluctance to change.

The promise of community participation as a means of planning and implementing social change was one that was widely accepted during the 60's and 1970's. The following points were made in an influential text on the topic:

...I suspect that we will see an increase in the number of planned-change programs along the lines discussed here - toward less bureaucratic and more participative, 'open system' and adaptive structures...I will try to summarize the necessary elements in implementation:

a) The client system should have as much understanding of the change and its consequences...as possible;

b) The change effort should be perceived as being as self-motivated and voluntary as possible.

c) The change program must include emotional and value as well as cognitive (informational) elements...

d) The change agent can be crucial in redirecting the resistance to change.
(Bennis, Benne, & Chin, 1969, pg. 77)

The community participation model includes in it an implicit explanation for the unwillingness of people to accept progress. According to this view people defy rational choices that lead to progress when they are not part of the decision making process. Underlying this point of view are some very strong assumptions about planned social change.

In addition, the literature about community development and participation focuses on the ideals of democratic procedures,

self-help, as well as the community and the need for it to play a central role in decision making (ASCDNER, 1960; Cox et al., 1975; Haplin, 1958; Herriott & Gross, 1979; OECD, 1974).

This position is well represented in the literature about planned educational change:

...while the administrator's role is clearly pivotal in bringing about change in schools, progress will be laboriously slow until community members and teachers develop a knowledgeable interest in the processes of organizational change. (Herriott & Gross, 1979)

Further these studies usually focus on three important strategies for successful innovation: 1) the opinion leaders and innovators should be placed in key positions; 2) change results from the diffusion and communication of knowledge about new ideas; 3) change in schools is positively related to financial support (Owens & Stienhoff, 1976).

The plan implemented in the Arcadia/New Hope reorganization attempt embodied all of these basic propositions. For example, the use of the community committees was based on the assumption that community involvement would be an important ingredient in an successful merger attempt. Considering the many past failures one Board member, who was involved in planning the merger, said:

It was felt that if we got enough people involved we'd probably convince a lot of people that it was the right thing...that maybe this would help. I don't think that it hindered us. I think we found out a lot of information about both districts during these studies...we had a lot of people working on, I can't remember how many committees,...I have to give them all credit for that.

Unfortunately we didn't get what we went for.

The selection of the community members was carefully considered, according to another Board member:

We used a mix of community leaders, regular people in the community and people who don't always get involved, as well as teachers... these community members were picked out from a big list we board members had...the board members sat around and said who do you think would be good for this committee and we tried to get as good a cross section as we could...we did try to get people that we thought would be influential even if we weren't necessarily good buddies with them...we selected some people that we knew were opinion leaders, because we did want this thing to fly... so we drew up a list and we asked if they wouldn't mind serving on a committee... and we had very few say no.

The effort to communicate the proposed changes to the people of both districts was a central feature of the entire effort:

...the committees made out reports and sent them to individuals on the mailing list at the school...we provided copies at a downtown store location, and put them on the counters so people could get committee reports...we had all kinds of public meetings to answer questions that people might have on the merger...We met with anybody and everybody, we met at firehalls, we had meetings here at the New Hope High School, and we had meetings at Arcadia. Ron Andy was in meetings just about every night of the week....the civic league...just about anybody...

The issue of taxes was a central one to both the planners of the reorganization proposal as well as to those opposed. The State had offered, to both districts, an increase in the operating and building aid if they merged. In the words of one New Hope board member:

The New York State Education Department and Legislature provides an added incentive for reorganization by increasing operation aid to 10 percent above the 65 percent average already supplied by State.¹ Operating aid relates to such items as teacher salaries, utilities, books, etc., needed to operate the district. The 10 percent increase continues for a full five years after consolidation; after that it decreases by 1 percent per year until exhausted. For example, in the 6th year of the merged district, additional aid would be 9 percent, in the 7th year 8 percent, in the 8th year 7 percent, etc.. According to the Financial Committee Report of the reorganization Study, the State would have provided the merged district with \$215,166 in additional operating aid alone in the 1982-83 budget year. This would have amounted to a property tax reduction of approximately \$3.00 on the true tax rate. (Letter to Editor, Westfield Press, 1-26-83)

As an incentive to reorganize, the State also included a 25 percent increase in building aid for each of the districts. This increased the State's contribution to the costs of new building and renovations to about 80 percent of the total cost. There was speculation that State aid would even go up higher in an effort to achieve school district reorganization. (Westfield Press, 2/7/83) Increases in the State's aid for school districts that accepted reorganization are the real substance of the State's effort to facilitate mergers. In the case of the Arcadia and New Hope reorganization attempt, the community-based committees studied the feasibility of the reorganization and provided a forum for community participation.

¹Since the time of this merger attempt the State has increased the financial incentives associated with reorganization.

The effort made by State educational authorities to include citizens in the decision-making about reorganization should not be construed as an attempt to place the authority of school policies into the hands of local constituents. On the contrary, the State was obviously seeking a way in which to facilitate the long-standing goal of school district reorganization. Consider the following comments made at a public meeting by Dr. Frank Peters, serving then as special consultant to the State Education Commissioner during the Arcadia/New Hope reorganization effort:

... by 1986, New York State will have reduced its number of school districts from the present 729 to about 500...over 55 school districts in the State are currently looking at centralization... and in light of declining enrollments and a shrinking tax base in districts across the State, this process of centralization will continue... and some of it will not be voluntary.
(Westfield Press, 12/14/82)

Further he notes, "This is the first time the commissioner has personally sent a consultant in on a merger project. Whatever happens here will generate an amount of information for future use and in further studies." (Northfork Times, 11/16/82)

The interest in this approach to reorganization was widespread, as evidenced by the fact that the State Senator visited several of the community meetings and commented, "This is a matter of great interest, a wholly new approach to reorganization..." (Randolph Times, 1/17/82)

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

On September 22, 1982, a small article in the Randolph Times announced that, "... committees were selected and

responsibilities outlined for study of the proposed consolidation of Arcadia and New Hope school districts." On September 29, 1982, a "kickoff" dinner meeting was held at the BOCES North Center for the purpose of organizing the committees. Approximately 130 people attended the meeting. Ron Andy, the New Hope Superintendent of Schools explained the purpose of the project:

Rather than have the school board initiate the reorganization study, the community participation model involves community members in data-gathering....When the vote comes it must be the best decision for both districts. When you talk to the people, there are two main questions to be considered: "Is this consolidation going to benefit the kids of both districts? And can we afford it? If these are answered in the affirmative, then we've got to go ahead. (Northfork Times, 9/30/82)

Each committee included a cross-section of people from the community: professional people, parents, community leaders, and farmers. Ten or twelve people comprise a single committee. The members volunteered their time. Eleven committees were formed, the name of each gives an idea of what educational concerns were covered:

- Executive Committee
- Educational Programs Committee
- Facilities Committee
- Finance Committee
- Transportation Committee
- Employer-Employee Relations Committee
- BOCES Committee(shared services)

- Extra-Curricular Activities Committee
- Committee on Board Size
- Community Use of School Facilities Committee.

During the following six weeks the committees conducted their studies. Each committee studied the current problems facing the districts, as well as the likely consequences of the proposed merger on the school districts. The final reports were presented at the local BOCES, to the Boards of Education, on November 15, 1982.

THE FINDINGS OF THE COMMITTEES

The unanimous recommendation of the committees was for school district reorganization. The need for the reorganization was defined in terms of declining enrollments, cost of maintaining old facilities, demands for additional space, and concern about expanded educational opportunities for students. If the districts reorganized taxes were not expected to increase. In fact, the Finance Committee speculated that taxes would go down because of reorganization incentive aid. The committees identified some problems, such as new teacher contracts, busing students, and extra curricular activities. These problems were not thought to be especially difficult for the reorganized district.

After receiving the endorsement of the committees, the members of the boards of education decided to continue with the reorganization proceedings. A letter was sent to the State

Education Commissioner declaring the intention of the school boards to introduce a referendum for school district reorganization. According to one board member,

Both boards were 100 percent behind the plan, at least formally. There was some doubt that was raised about one or two board members, whether they were really in favor of it...

In the weeks that followed we were told, these dissenters emerged as part of a group called the Concerned Citizens, which organized the defeat of the referendum.

If the purpose of the community-based research committees was to involve the citizens in the decision to consolidate, the attendance of the public meetings following the committee's reports is a good indication of the success of that strategy. At the first public information meeting, held at New Hope Central High School, December 14th, over 250 citizens showed up. Superintendent Andy said that he was "very, very pleased with the turnout at Monday's first information meeting." (Northfork Times, 12-14-82)

In Arcadia, the first meeting on December 22nd drew over 100 people. There was a flurry of public information meetings that followed these initial meetings where the committees presented their findings. One board member commented that the superintendents of both schools must have been at a meeting every night of the week for about a month.

The hope for the consolidation was high, as can be noted in this comment by Superintendent of schools from Arcadia, Jim Mateus:

It is a no-lose proposition in which we take a good look at ourselves and are bound to profit in the future whether as a combined district or separately. The very fact that all but two persons contacted about serving on committees were willing, demonstrates that people care. Nothing is being forced upon us, the very people who will ultimately make the decision will be providing the input for that decision; one which is bound to be the best for the community and the students. (Randolph Times, October 6, 1982)

Ultimately, however, the 'people' choose to reject the merger proposal, despite the State's and Board's best efforts.

THE CONCERNED CITIZENS GROUP

While the school officials were trying to convince people of the advantages of a consolidated school district, there emerged a group of citizens who opposed the consolidation. The first newspaper report of this group appeared in the Westfield Press, December 31, 1982. The article noted that 40 people, calling themselves "Concerned Citizens", met in East Hill to discuss their opposition to the proposed merger.

On January 5th, 1983 the superintendents of the school district, with the aid of the State representatives, conducted a survey of the community's opinion on the school district reorganization plan. The survey had been conducted as a final check of community opinion before continuing with the reorganization referendum paper work.

The survey was conducted in the evening by phone. The list was compiled from the phone book and consisted of 800 randomly selected household phone numbers, of which 555 answered the

phone. Of those who answered the phone, 439 were qualified to vote and agreed to take part in the survey. According to Dr. Peters, virtually everyone contacted knew about the proposed consolidation: 99 percent of the 439 people contacted knew about the merger proposal. When asked how they would vote if they had to vote that day, 95 of the 439 people interviewed (or 19 percent) said that they would require more information to make a decision. Of those who said they were ready to cast their vote, 44 percent said they would vote yes, 38 percent said they would vote no. By dividing those who abstained into equal groups for and against, the members planning the proposed merger were able to say that the "survey shows up to 54 percent of the voters back the merger." Dr. Peters was quoted as saying that "the survey was a reliable and valid system" (Northfork Times, 1-11-83; Westfield Press, 1-11-83)

The Boards members were well satisfied with the results and decided to proceed with their formal petition for school district reorganization. The board members collected the 100 signatures they needed to make the referendum legal, and set February 8th as the voting date.

Opposition to the referendum proposal was wide spread, and by the time of the phone survey included 4 members from the school boards. Much of the opposition was organized through the group called the Concerned Citizens. After the phone survey, Mr. Miller, president of the group as well as Town supervisor for Hillmount, called a meeting, which was attended by about 70

people. Miller expressed suspicion about the validity of the survey: "Our group doesn't believe the survey was random. We believe that it was directed toward those in favor of the merger." (Northfork Herald, 1-13-83) It is at this time that the group began to circulate a petition of their own, in opposition of the one circulated by the Board.

The petition called for the school boards to consider cancellation of the merger plan, but allowed that the district may want to consider it at another time. The Concerned Citizens group argued against the reorganization on several grounds:

- that the information presented about the consolidation was not presented "in a true democratic process";
- that there had not been enough time to study the issue;
- that the cost of the consolidation was a major issue, especially considering the fixed income of the older people; and the fact that industry was moving out of the district;
- that the promises of State aid were simply promises, and not to be counted on, considering the problems of the tax deficits and inflation.
- that costs in the future may be escalating, especially for new building programs.
- doubts as to why the State was focusing on

consolidation and new buildings, instead of improving curriculum and planning;

- and finally community pride, summarized in this New Hope woman's comment; "The State better prove that the curriculum is substandard before they try to force consolidation down our throats." (Westfield Press, 1/12/83)

The weeks before the referendum vote were furious ones in the communities. The papers were full of advertisements taken out by those in favor and those opposed to the referendum. The letters to the editors expressed the range of emotions and thoughts about the merger proposal:

I am a taxpayer too, but I see a way to provide a better education and not increase our taxes as much as they will if we try to struggle on as two separate school districts.

We are angered that the bureaucracy in Albany increasingly mandates expensive, wasteful programs...Albany's favorite image is that of a large building complex, frequently isolated, serving small communities...

We would be among the first to vote for badly needed renovation and enlargement of our school facilities to benefit our children and those of our friends in Arcadia. we are afraid to vote for an unknown which might commit us to an expensive unnecessary building program...

In the last two weeks before the vote the concerned Citizens group was especially active. While Dr. Roger Peters and the superintendents summed up their arguments for reorganization in two large meetings one at each school, the Concerned Citizens spread their arguments by meetings, by phone and by word of

mouth. Dr. Peters commented on the intensity of the organization of the Concerned Citizens,

If the vote had been held earlier it might have passed. Within the past week or ten days the opposition had been highly organized with cars to transport voters to the polls, paid advertising and meetings." (Westfield Press, 2/9/83)

Despite the predictions of a close vote, the decision was a landslide. Over 2,600 ballots were cast, 952 approved and 1,620 opposed the reorganization. In New Hope school district over 1,700 voters turned out. One State official observed that to his knowledge no other vote on school issues in New Hope had ever attracted more than 1000 voters. Arcadia voters cast 869 ballots, passing the previous high turnout of about 840 voters. (Rivertown Rag, 2/9/83)

The failure of the referendum sent both school boards back to the planning stage for school improvements. Both schools replaced roofs. Arcadia replaced all the windows in the school with energy efficient ones. Several of the schools offices and classrooms were extensively remodeled. Arcadia replaced a boiler for heating and rewired some of the safety equipment.

The school board at Arcadia has changed very little, since the defeat of consolidation. Only one person has retired, due to time constraints. New Hope lost four of its members, and now includes a representative of the Concerned Citizen's group. Entry onto the school board is not difficult; in both districts the races for seats are usually uncontested. According to one

community member who used to serve as a board member, the New Hope school board is organized by a special arrangement:

the school board was set up years ago on a gentleman's agreement, so that board members would represent the areas consolidated during the original centralization in the year 1946. So they have two from the village, one from East Hill, and another from another district, and if one left his position then the community would try and fill that slot with somebody from that area.

There is no real consensus, on the part of community members, about why the referendum for reorganization was rejected. The most accessible, and most often used explanation deals with the communities' fears about losing their identity. In view of much of the past history about the communities this explanation does not seem very likely, because these communities have had to cope with a changing identity for many years. In terms of the industrial base in the area, we find a dynamic situation, where business are constantly changing and merging in order to survive. Further, with these changing economic opportunities the migration of people in and out of the area in search jobs has constantly changed the identity of the communities.

Another argument given for the rejection was the perception that the area had a lot of poor older people on fixed incomes who would be hard hit by additional taxes if the State's plan for assistance did not work the way it was intended. A review of the demographics of the area indicates that neither New Hope nor

Arcadia were especially burdened with a disproportionate number or older people.

Many citizens of New Hope were unsure about acquiring the problems and debts accumulated by Arcadia if the two districts merged. The main argument against the merger focused on the opinion that the school in New Hope was relatively new and free of debt. Moreover, many of the New Hope citizens expressed concern about merging with Arcadia because the school was so small and the area was so poor. Further, as State officials argued that the quality of education in small schools, particularly poor small schools, was not good, many New Hope citizens interpreted the arguments to support their position that merging with a poor small school would not help their school.

A comparison of the two school districts reveals, however, that Arcadia not only has a larger economic base per pupil than New Hope, but that the school expenditure per pupil is also greater. In many respects the concerns about the merger as they are described here were unfounded. The concerns do, however, illustrate the uncertainty surrounding the entire reorganization question. One teacher likened the vote to asking a car buyer to decide on a car without ever seeing it. The risk seems especially great when one realizes that the decision would be a lasting one.²

²In New York State once a reorganization takes place it is impossible to return to the original organizational structure of the districts.

The plan which included the community in the decision making was suppose to overcome much of the resistance to change. But this assumes that the resistance stems not so much from substantive concerns but rather from a lack of communication and a failure to have "ownership" in the decision. It is clear that the community feasibility study helped achieve a great deal of participation. What is less clear is that the resistance about accepting the reorganization was due to questions of poor communications and other social relations. Interviews with parents of school children and other community members reveal substantive concerns about the issues of curriculum, teacher quality and taxes.

COMMUNITY VIEW'S OF THE SCHOOL AND REORGANIZATION

One argument favoring the proposed consolidation holds that a larger school district can provide more courses and hence a better education for its students. This proposition was explicitly put forth as the reason for the consolidation by Susan Warren, who was then President of the New Hope Board of Education. In a public meeting she is quoted as saying that the purpose of the consolidation is to, "Give the students in both communities the opportunity to receive the best education possible, to prepare them for the 21st century." In the same meeting Pat Lore, BOCES Superintendent, was asked, "What can a consolidated district offer that New Hope can't offer now?". He

is quoted as responding, "Improvement in the curriculum because of the larger number of students involved." (Randolph Newspaper, 12/15/82) One community member challenged these assertions:

If the State is going to ask us to consolidate our school district with Arcadian because they think our curriculum is substandard, they are first going to have to prove that it is substandard. (Westfield Press, 12/15/82)

Generally, there was widespread support for the education being offered in each of the districts. As one community member comments:

I would say that the community is pretty much satisfied with the quality of education...a good percentage of the graduates do go on to college. Many of them at least go on to a junior college such as Rivertown Community College or Northgate Community College. A large number of them go on to four year colleges. There is even a very small percentage that are the top students of the class and they get into a major college or university. We have one that went to RPI last year...

In fact, there is evidence that students of both school districts are doing reasonably well. The Comprehensive Assessment Report on both districts indicates that about 30 percent of the students receive Regents Diploma, and only four percent of the students failed to receive a regular high school diploma. The performance of students on the State's Pupil Evaluation Program Tests, was good in both districts; an average of about 95 percent of the students scored above the State's Reference Point (SRP) on the various courses.

Certainly the reorganization would have led to new curricular offerings for students. This argument failed to persuade many community members, however, not because they did not believe it, but because they were unconvinced that the advantages would be extensive and meaningful to everyone. Consider the following two comments, both from individuals who strongly supported the consolidation proposition. An elder Statesman from Arcadian compared the quality of the today's education to that which he received:

The quality of education? I personally see it as being of high quality. It certainly is vastly different from my high school days, and I think by and large our school board members and people have done a good job.

In New Hope a PTA member expressed his support for the school's curriculum after learning about the computer systems used in the school district:

...we have something like 20 computers up at the elementary school. I have some parents call me and say that they think [computers] are nothing more than an electronic ditto sheet. So I went to the classroom, introduced myself to the teacher... she took the time and showed me how the system worked, and I think it is one of the most fantastic systems going.

While many of the community members felt that the schools were doing a good job providing courses their children needed, some argued that the schools ought to "stick to the basics". The following quote is from a community member who opposed the

consolidation referendum, partially because the merger would expand the number of courses offered:

...on a Statewide scale this school is average or better...but I still think that the emphasis should be applied more on the basics and forget some of this other stuff...I tell you, if you want to pick up a packet of applications we have at our factory and read them through, you'd be damned surprised at some of them. If they can write their names they're doing pretty good...

Another community member expressed his concern that consolidation for the sake of expanded curricular offerings misses the responsibility that schools have to the majority of the students:

...sure there are some children that could gain from consolidation. For instance, if you wanted to teach Spanish, and you got one kid here who wants to learn Spanish, and if you got us all together you might have four. Well, then you could have a Spanish teacher. I don't know, I always felt that these, well for lack of another term, brilliant children...would succeed regardless of what you did...and why try to do this whole thing [consolidation] for a handful of children, when you could do a lot more for the majority. It just seemed that this big thing was going to help so few children.

The argument that the extra scheduling and courses offered by reorganization would only help those few students who are really able was further expressed by community members who witnessed their own peers pick up the courses they needed to continue their career when they got to college:

... we had all eight grades in the same classroom, a real rural district school, and I feel that we did raise good educated people...I can name many of them that went on to be lawyers, doctors and you name it.

Implicit in many of these arguments is another basic debate, one which focuses not on what is taught but on the quality of instruction itself. Like many analysts today, those who expressed concern about the quality of the schools eventually turn their focus to the teachers:

I think that the grade of education today has gone downhill instead of improving. That's my opinion...I think that it reflects right back to the teachers and beyond ...I'm not stating that our faculty and staff is not doing the best that they can...but I think it's the best that they can do given their experiences when they were in college.

The literature about declining quality in public school teachers is so pervasive that it is hard to tell what has influenced the opinions of these community members. Many parents acknowledged that their children have had good teachers, but these same parents seem unwilling to accept that teachers, especially in a rural school setting, could be of high caliber. Consider this parent's comments:

I'm just saying that your smarter ones [teachers] are going out into other industries... so I think that we are getting stuck with a lot of teachers who could give me that new math, or science and not really know what to do with it...why would a teacher come into a depressed area like this and apply for a job that doesn't pay as much as another area. Could it be that they can't get hired in another area?

This parent just recently moved to the New Hope area from a larger town in New York State. He was in favor of the consolidation because, he said, that he was "aware of the advantages the larger school could offer school children." In

the same interview, however, this parent said that his child, a fourth-grader, "...has had the best year since her kindergarten."

He described the teachers at New Hope as special:

What the teachers did, and where I think it's important, just as important as curriculum, is they built her self-confidence ...She came here thinking she was dumb, the teachers instilled in her some self-confidence and self-respect, the rest of it started to come together.

The message from this individual is a confused one, but represents the dilemma many parents face when talking about the quality of the schools in the small school district. Each and every person interviewed had something good to say about the school district, appearing almost defensive at times. It is hard to miss, however, that the State "experts" asserted that small school districts are deficient and should be improved and reorganized. As Susan Warren stated, the issue was progress:

"...the consolidation was to help students prepare for the 21st century." Peter Fry of the Arcadian School Board put it this way: "Let us progress, not go backward. A merger means a better educational opportunity for our children and we should move in this direction. (Randolph Times, 12/15/82)

The dilemma before these parents and teachers is: How can one defend the school without appearing to be against progress? The stigma was a strong one, as this community member illustrates:

I would say this, that people who supported the school board and supported the school were people who were well informed. The people who didn't support that sort of thing, and they were in the majority, usually in rural areas, were not as well informed.

Obviously the State's notion of progress through expansion has met with mixed response from community members. The issue of curriculum itself is not sufficient to move people towards the decision to accept school district reorganization. In fact many of the people who were opposed to the reorganization were in favor of the State's Regent Plan. It appears that community members were balancing their decisions, about the merger, on some other criteria, or rather a combination of criteria.

The evidence described above suggests that the citizen's views of the schools vary considerably over substantive issues, and not simply questions of community identity. While the procedures of community participation proved to be good ones to promote the debate, they were not sufficient to overcome these questions of quality, relevance and cost. One of the questions that was raised is whether the small rural school can retain good teachers. This is an important question for the consolidation debate because one of the arguments in favor of consolidation is that the larger school district can attract and hold better qualified teachers.

TEACHER PROFILE

Teachers are arguably the single most important educational resource. Rural and small schools are generally said to have problems recruiting and retaining high quality faculty. One frequently heard story is that young teachers pass through the

small rural schools on their way up to better paying school districts, and older professionals on their way out of the profession settle into small schools before retirement. In many respects the profile of the teachers in New Hope and Arcadia contradicts these assertions.

The State's BEDS data were used to collect basic demographic characteristics about the teachers. The district files of teachers hired and released, over the last 5 years, provide some estimate of the districts ability to attract and retain qualified teachers. As a measure of work load the teachers of each district were compared in terms of the number of subject areas, assignments and sections that they teach. Finally, an informal survey was conducted, during the interviews with teachers, to assess their attitudes about the communities and schools they worked in, as well as the issue of consolidation.

TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS

Despite the difference in the size of these two districts (student population: Arcadia enrollment = 485; New Hope = 832) we found the characteristics of the teachers to be very similar. These findings are not unique, the results reported in the table below are comparable to the characteristics of teachers in other districts of similar size. The following table compares the two districts:

VARIABLE	New Hope	Arcadia
NUMBER OF TEACHERS	62.0	40.0
% FULL TIME	100.0	95.5
% OF FEMALE TEACHERS	54.2	70.4
MEAN AGE OF TEACHERS	38.3	39.0
MEAN DEGREE STATUS	6.2	6.0
MEAN # YEARS EXP DISTRICT	10.5	12.7
MEAN # YEARS IN OTHER DIST	1.6	2.5
MEAN # YEARS ASSIGN EXP	9.1	13.6
MEAN SALARY	19689.32	20418.38

The characteristics of the teachers are primarily middle age, female, and well educated, with over ten years experience in the district. The vast majority of these rural school teachers are working full time. Most of the teachers are working on their masters degree (degree status 6), but a number have achieved a higher degree of education. Both groups of teachers show considerable experience within their area of assignment, an average of about 11.5 years. Remarkably, Arcadia appears to have a more experienced group of teachers, both in terms of longevity within the district, and years of experience in their teaching assignment.

The individual variation of salaries between teachers is very great in all the districts we used to compare these two districts. Salaries in both Arcadia and New Hope, fall close to the mean with districts of comparable size. New Hope has a 20

step salary schedule, with a step function for advanced degrees. The salaries for teachers in New Hope include the entire range the schedule from \$12,212 to \$28,242, with the mean of \$19,689. The range of salaries in Arcadia, including part-time teachers, is \$7,960 to \$26,859; the mean equals \$20,418. The salary schedule for Arcadia is considerably more difficult to decipher than that of New hope. It has a 16 step schedule for all teachers. Salaries are increased by a fixed sum for each additional graduate school credit a teacher accumulates and a bonus is given for a masters degree.

The degree to which the teachers are satisfied with these salaries depends on their circumstances. A science teacher in New Hope states that he is acutely aware of the fact that his salary is low compared to other district averages. He would like to move to another higher paying district but, he says,:

There is absolutely no way I can go to another district. I mean I've been here fifteen years. What am I going to do, jump to another district and start at the bottom of the pay scale. You know when you're on the borderline you can't trash 3 or 4 thousand dollars. You have to make every penny count.

Other teachers argue that their salaries are really quite good for the area, especially as a second income: "...most of the people that are here teaching, have a double income. Their spouse either teaches in another area school, or works at another job."

Despite these problems most of the teachers expressed satisfaction with living and working in a rural area. According

to one teacher who has taught in a large New Jersey school, the differences are important:

...the biggest difference has to do with the attitude of the students. At Arcadia the students are so friendly. We have our small problems, but most of the time the students are easy to get along with... that makes all the difference in my job. My experience in New Jersey was never so easy. The discipline problems and the attitudes of the students were a constant source of irritation.

Contrary to the expectation that these districts would be imbalanced toward the younger and older teacher, these districts appear to be able to hire and hold teachers throughout their working life span. The average age of the teachers in these two district is about 38.5 years. The range within each district is similar: Arcadia 27 to 58; and New Hope 22 to 57. The distribution of age for the teachers, in both districts, falls along a relatively normal curve, with about 60 percent of the teachers between the ages of 32 and 42. The rest are evenly distributed above and below this middle group.

As mentioned above, one of the speculations about small rural schools is that they are not able to retain nor attract teachers with experience. One measure of the teacher's mobility is to look at the number of years experience they have in their districts. The mean number years teaching experience is 10.5 for New Hope, and 12.7 for Arcadia. In New Hope, over 50 percent of the teachers have never taught in another district. Arcadia, by comparison, has fewer teachers (39 percent) who have never taught in another districts. Obviously, in Arcadia the teachers have

more teaching experience in other districts; about 40 percent have three or more years experience in other school districts. Only 16 percent of the teachers in New Hope have that much experience in other districts.

In the last five years Arcadia has lost four of its staff members, hired nine new ones, resulting in a 26.4 percent increase in staffing. New Hope has lost about nine of its staff, while hiring 10 new staff members. The table below summarizes the characteristics of the teachers hired and lost:

TEACHERS HIRED IN LAST FIVE YEARS

	TOTAL OF TEACHERS	# WITH MASTERS	MEAN # OF YEARS EXP
New Hope	10	3	1.1
Arcadia	9	7	4.0

TEACHERS LOST IN LAST FIVE YEARS

	TOTAL OF TEACHERS	# WITH MASTERS	MEAN # OF YEARS EXP
New Hope	9	4	7.33
Arcadia	4	3	10.5

Several of the community members argued that quality of the teachers was not that good in the districts,

...Arcadia is not exactly the best paying school district so why would a teacher come out here to the boonies and work at a low wage unless they were unable to get a better job at another.

Obviously there are any number of reason that well qualified teachers might be working in a district with low pay. Many of the teachers have spouses who work; in fact, several of the teachers cite this as the reason they are working in the area.

It does not appear that either of these districts finds it impossible to attract and retain qualified teachers. In Arcadia seven of the nine teachers hired in the last five years came with a Masters Degree. All of these teachers where mid career, with less than seven years teaching experience. New Hope, the larger of the two districts, hired more teachers with less experience and training. This is an important fact since one of reasons given for rejecting the reorganization was that people in New Hope were afraid of assuming the problems and shortcomings of Arcadia. The findings show that Arcadia, the smaller of the two schools, is able to retain and attract teachers with more experience than New Hope.

TEACHER COURSE LOAD

One of the reasons given for consolidation has to do with the assumption that the smaller schools load their teachers with too many courses, courses for which they are poorly trained and improperly prepared. The table below provides evidence that while a few more teachers in the smaller district, Arcadia, teach several subject areas, the work load is very similar between the two district. The statistics below include only full- 40 week-courses, and only the high school and junior high teachers.

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

	New Hope	Arcadia
# OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS	35.0	23.0
% TEACHING IN ONLY ONE SUB AREA	88.57%	67.77%
MEAN # SUBJECT AREAS/TEACHER	1.11	1.38
MEAN # PREPARATIONS/TEACHER	2.42	2.95
MEAN # OF SECTIONS/TEACHER	4.2	4.29

A subject area refers to a field of study such as math, or English. Each teacher could have several preparations within, or a subject area, such as English 9, and 10 or math 11, and calculus. Teachers could also have several preparations between subject areas, such as two preparations in math and two in English. In this example, the teacher would be teaching in two subject areas, with four preparations per day. The number of sections refers to the total number of classroom appearances a teacher makes during a day. For example, if a teacher were assigned two courses, say English 9 and English 10, and taught each course three times per day, then that teacher would have six sections of classes per day.

The variation between the two districts lends support to the proposition that the smaller schools overload their teachers. Further evidence of this is provided by examining the number of required preparations for teachers in the two districts. In New Hope 31.4 percent of the teachers have only one preparation, while in Arcadia only 19 percent of the teachers are so assigned. These teachers are mostly specialists, such as reading

specialist, music and art teachers, as well as shop and computer science teachers. Obviously New Hope is able to hire many more specialists than Arcadia.

As we examined the assignments of teachers we found that teachers in New Hope generally had fewer class preparations than teachers in Arcadia. Over 44 percent of the teachers in Arcadia are responsible for four or more preparations during a day. In New Hope only 20 percent of the teachers are assigned that many preparations.

When teachers were asked what these loads meant to them, they said that it was not the task of teaching across subject areas that was difficult, the problem was in preparing a curriculum. Virtually all of the teachers interviewed complained that when they were first hired, they had no curriculum guide to work with. A science teacher in New Hope says:

The person ahead of me must have done his masters in education on science textbooks, or something, because when I walked in the door there was just a ton of textbooks, and the principal pointed to them and said, 'There you go!' ...and that was my curriculum guide...for the first couple of years I was in the school system I developed a curriculum with objective and all that. Later I became concerned with sequencing my courses. I teach regents Earth Science, ninth grade General Science, tenth grade General Science and seventh grade Life Science. I tried to get help from the State Education Department...they were no help at all...so I did it myself.

The issue of curriculum development was a important one to the teachers. We found, in an informal survey, that over 70 percent of the teachers were not satisfied with the procedures

for developing, maintaining and determining school curriculum. Further, writing a curriculum guide is time consuming according to a Arcadia teacher: A social studies teacher (Regents) says that, "It usually takes me about 5 years to get a course rolling along so that I'm not doing massive hours of work at home..."

This issue is beyond the scope of this study, but it is an important one which deserves more attention. It seems especially important when one thinks about the problem of retaining teachers in the rural schools. In these schools where salaries are often lower, the inclusion of 'massive' extra hours effectively reduces the teachers salaries. Further, if teachers are forced to work extra hours developing curriculum they must forced to forego their leisure time or an opportunity to work supplementing their income. The dilemma is that often teachers are recruited because they bring fresh ideas and are interested in developing and expanding programs. Further the problems of sequencing curriculum with the rest of the courses offered in the school forces teachers to rework a curriculum guide.

The teachers of Arcadia appear to be slightly more qualified, but have a heavier work load than teachers in New Hope. Clearly, Arcadia requires more of their teachers in terms of preparation. Despite this the district is able to attract and retain teachers with training and experience. One explanation may be found in the fact that a large number of the teachers in Arcadia are women. Many of these teachers travel from Northfork and Pennsylvania to work. Arcadia is about 10 miles closer to

these areas than New Hope and that may be an important selection criteria.

The evidence presented here contradicts several arguments for reorganization. First, both schools are able to attract teachers of quality, in terms of experience and training. Despite the heavier loads required of teachers in the smaller school, they seem satisfied with their work both by the fact that they stay as well by their own statements. Second, those citizens who opposed reorganization for fear of assuming only the problems of the other district had little basis for their fear with regard to the training and experience of teachers working at Arcadia.

It appears that, on some points, Arcadia would have been an attractive partner in school district reorganization. As will be shown the district has a larger tax base than does New Hope, it spends more on education per pupil than does New Hope, and, further, the teachers are as well qualified and experienced, if not more so, than those of New Hope. It would appear that reorganization did have some advantages for taxpayers in New Hope. One of the main assumptions for reorganization was, however, that smaller schools were not able to provide their students with the educational opportunities that larger schools offered. The following analysis of curricular offering shows that the curriculum was not so deficient that there would not have been some mutual benefit on both sides of a reorganization. On the other hand, it was exactly these facts about curriculum

that led other citizens to argue that the merger was not necessary.

CURRICULUM

One of the comments often made about small schools is that they can provide only a limited number of courses, with only a few sections of each. This has been argued as one of the main reasons for consolidation of small school districts. In the case of Arcadia and New Hope the issue of course offerings was a central theme to those in favor of the consolidation. Individuals opposed to consolidation argued that the schools were already providing the "basics", as well as many electives, and that the larger school system would not necessarily be able to provide more course offerings.

Curriculum was presented, by those who organized the referendum for reorganization, as the single most important reason for merging the two districts. Don Andy, Superintendent of Schools in New Hope, said, "...if we can't provide better programs through consolidation, I don't want it." (Northfork Times, 11/16/82) The chairman of the Curriculum Committee expressed a similar position, "We feel that the curriculum is the heart of the whole merger. If the merger is going to float we have to offer better educational programs." (Northfork Times, 11/16/82) There was widespread support by parents in the communities about the importance of curricular offerings:

I believe many people are forgetting the most important reason for this proposed merger,

the education of our children...This merger is the best way to provide the education our children need and deserve...Many students leave high school unprepared for college or even finding jobs because the teachers were unable to provide the proper and additional courses the students needed...Lack of funds, rooms and scheduling problems wouldn't permit it...Our children's education, not school names, or questions of identity should be the issue in this merger. (Letter to editor, Westfield Press)

The expansion of curricular offerings would solve many of the problems that face the two districts, according to Mr. Warren, Superintendent of Schools in Arcadia:

...some courses are offered ever other year in the science and math programs and this makes it very difficult for students studying these subjects. In New hope many courses are only offered once a day, and this makes it very difficult for students interested in the BOCES programs. If these courses were offered twice a day students would be able to take part in the BOCES programs and still take their required courses. (Randolph Times, 1/5/83)

The Curriculum Committee's study identified three basic groups in the schools: college bound, vocational and non-vocational students. According to the committee, curricular improvements should be organized around the needs of these groups. A long list of courses was presented to illustrate the possibilities for curricular improvement.

The committee recognized, however, that expanded curricular offerings would require additional space, so it included a strong recommendation for a middle school. "A Middle School", the Committee's report said,

Could ease the difficult transition [of students from Elementary to High School status], reduce discipline problems, and most of all enhance learning for our students.

Not all the citizens of the communities agreed with these reports; one of the concerns was the cost of supplying these opportunities. Nor did all the community members agreed that these expansions were needed: "A new building and expensive equipment are no guarantee to a better education..." said one community member. Rather than investing money in buildings and equipment, this individual felt that the schools should focus on the individual needs of the students, and work on the "generative" subjects: English, Math, Science and Foreign Language. Further, it is not obvious that supplying these additional opportunities will necessarily lead to students taking advantage of them.

The problems rural and small schools have providing their students with educational opportunities has been a key issue concern of the State's. Dr. Roger Peters noted that while the State traditionally has been reluctant to interfere with local government, "...it does so when the local level does not meet the needs of its people, such has been the case with handicapped students." (Northfork Times, 12/15/82) According to Peters Arcadia and New Hope were especially deficient:

Each district needs to do something about its facilities, and improved educational opportunities are desperately needed at both districts. (Northfork Times, 12/15/82)

The communities' response to these statements was very strong, as one citizen's reaction suggests: "The State had better prove that the curriculum is substandard before they try to force consolidation down our throats." (Westfield Press, 1/10/83) There is ample evidence that in fact smaller school districts do not offer their students the same range of educational opportunities as do larger districts (Monk, 1986). The question remains, however, whether the curriculum of these two districts was especially inadequate.

In the rest of this section the high school course offerings in each school are presented for comparison. The courses have been organized into 17 subject areas. Each school's curriculum is compared to the average curricular offerings of a sample of ten school districts with the same enrollment. This comparison ensures that neither district is uniquely different in some unforeseen way. The data were collected from the 1984 State BEDS files.

We make two simple comparisons. The purpose of the first is to determine whether the accusation about these schools' curricula being especially deficient has merit. To do this we compare the number of courses offered in each subject area with the school group averages. These averages were compiled by adding the number of courses (as defined by State assignment codes) offered in each subject area and dividing by the number of schools.

The purpose of the second comparison is to determine whether there was any obvious difference in the course offerings between the two schools: Arcadia and New Hope. New Hope has twice the enrollment of Arcadia. If the argument that increased size results in more circular offerings has merit, then we should see some obvious differences between these two schools and the averages of the two groups.

The interpretation of these comparisons requires special care. One of the problems with the data is that the part-time and full-time courses are mixed together. In this table part-time courses have been counted equally with full-time courses. This means that a district with many part-time course will look much better than is really justified. However, the results provide a basis for comparison and generally indicate that neither school was especially deficient with regards to curriculum.

NUMBER OF UNIQUE COURSES OFFERED BY SUBJECT AREA

	Reference Group For Arcadia	Arcadia	Reference Group For New Hope	New Hope
SPECIAL ED	4.0	5.6	4.0	5.7
REMEDIAL READ	2.0	1.2	3.0	1.9
ENGLISH	10.0	8.0	7.0	8.4
FOREIGN LANG	4.0	5.3	4.0	4.3
MATHEMATICS	9.0	8.7	8.0	9.6
SCIENCES	8.0	7.1	7.0	7.1
SOCIAL ST	8.0	6.2	8.0	6.8

FINE ARTS HS	4.0 3.5	4.0 5.9
MUSIC HS	8.0 9.1	8.0 8.3
DRIVER ED	1.0 0.7	0.0 0.6
GIFTED PROG	1.0 0.4	1.0 0.7
COMPUTER ED	1.0 1.1	N.A. 0.6
LIBRARY ED	1.0 0.7	N.A. 0.8
AGRICULTURE	0.0 0.5	6.0 0.9
BUSINESS	5.0 4.8	4.0 7.5
HOME ECON	3.0 3.7	6.0 4.8
TRADE COURSES	3.0 5.0	4.0 5.3
TOTALS	72.0 71.6	74.0 79.2

These tables offer an opportunity to answer the question we posed about size and course offerings. The smaller reference group schools offered, on an average, fewer courses than did the larger reference group schools. The Arcadia reference group mean was 71.6 courses; the corresponding New Hope reference group mean was 79.2 courses. It is interesting to note, however, that in 5 of the 17 subject areas the smaller schools actually equalled or offered more courses compared to the larger schools: foreign language, sciences, music, driver education, computer education. In general, the differences between the two groups were not remarkable, unless those 8 additional courses were especially important ones.

For the schools in our study, Arcadia compares favorably to its reference group, offering more courses than the mean of the

group in 11 of the 17 subject areas. New Hope is somewhat below the mean of its group, excelling in only 5 of the 17 subject areas.

Comparing the two school districts directly, Arcadia offered 72 courses while New Hope offered 74. Arcadia equals or exceeds the number of courses offered to those of New Hope, in 13 of the 17 subject areas. This is a surprising finding since many of the proponents of the consolidation merger argued for it on the assumption that a larger school would have more course offerings. Those community members who doubted that the consolidation would substantially improve their students curriculum appear to have some grounds for an argument.

Another way of judging the quality of the educational opportunities in these districts is by comparing the number of sections offered in each subject area. This comparison suggests that school district enrollment affects on the availability of courses.

NUMBER OF SECTIONS/SUBJECT AREA

	Reference Group For Arcadia	Arcadia	Reference Group For New Hope	New Hope
SPECIAL ED	4.0	5.5	7.0	8.5
REMEDIAL READ	6.0	7.2	11.0	8.4
ENGLISH	16.0	14.7	19.0	23.3
FOREIGN LANG	4.0	5.3	6.0	5.4
MATHEMATICS	13.0	14.0	15.0	20.6
SCIENCES	10.0	9.0	15.0	16.2

SOCIAL ST	12.0 11.7	21.0 19.5
FINE ARTS HS	4.0 3.9	7.0 6.4
MUSIC HS	10.0 9.4	12.0 10.7
DRIVER ED	1.0 0.9	0.0 1.0
GIFTED PROG	1.0 0.4	5.0 1.4
COMPUTER ED	1.0 2.7	/? 1.5
LIBRARY ED	1.0 2.7	/? 4.3
AGRICULTURE	0.0 0.5	7.0 1.0
BUSINESS	5.0 4.8	5.0 7.5
HOME ECON	5.0 4.0	7.0 5.6
TRADE COURSES	4.0 5.6	7.0 6.8
TOTAL HS	97.0 102.3	143.0 148.1
ELEM/SPECIAL CLASSES	38.0 36.4	42.0 57.9
DISTRICT TOTAL	135.0 138.0	185.0 206.0

Not surprisingly, larger schools offer considerably more course sections than do the smaller schools. The New Hope reference group offered on an average 206 sections, with a range of 163 to 245. The Arcadia reference group offered an average of 139 sections, with a range of 123 to 169. Notice that when we eliminate the elementary class sections as well as the unique special classes, that the difference in the number of sections diminishes between the groups. The mean difference between the two groups was 46 sections. The difference between Arcadia and New Hope is likewise 46 sections. Notice that New Hope is below

the mean number of sections for a school district its size while Arcadia is very close to the mean.

The English offering is an excellent example of the differences between these two districts. Arcadia offers 10 English courses; a basic sequence of 7 through 12 grade grammar and literature, as well as, 4 electives (Science Fiction, Mass Media; Theatre; Writing Lab). These electives have been offered for years, with only minor changes in the topics. The most current listing (1986) of classes includes these electives changes; journalism, and a topic called Lost Generalizations have replaced Mass Media and the Writing Lab. The courses have been well attended: Science Fiction has 21 students enrolled, Journalism 14, and Lost Generations 16.

New Hope offers more sections of its core sequence English courses, and provides an AP English. The most recent course listing includes 3 sections of English for each of the grade levels 7 through 12. Each of these classes enrolls at least 16 students and most include over 20 students. The Advanced Placement course has 6 students.

In summary, the two school districts are remarkable similar in course offerings considering their size differences. In fact, Arcadia, the smaller of the two school districts, actually offers more courses in a number of subject areas. New Hope offers more sections of its courses. These facts do not capture how the school districts are managing these courses, the larger districts may be tracking and providing special assistance which the

smaller districts are unable to offer. The claim that smaller schools offer an inadequate curricular offering is difficult to substantiate using these data. It appears that parents had some basis for challenging this claim.

Comparing each school district to the average school district of comparable size, Arcadia actually measures up very well, with New Hope falling a little below the mean number of course offerings and sections provided in districts of comparable size. This is surprising since we expected New Hope, the larger of the two schools, to offer substantially more courses than Arcadia. As we suggested earlier, the difference may be the result of including the part-time courses in the count with the full-time courses. On the other hand, the claim that larger schools offer more courses may be confounded by a superintendent's interest in making the course more available (the number of sections). An expansion of the number of a few core courses to provide a schedule to students which was flexible, would severely limit the opportunity of providing additional courses.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION

VIEWS OF COMMUNITY LIFE

A recurring theme in our interviews with parents, teachers and community members, was the fear that reorganization would result in the loss of community identity. As one community

member put it, "I think that the Arcadia people felt they were going to lose their identity, that they would be thrown in with New Hope and vice versa." In order to get a better sense of this notion of community identity, we asked people what making a home was like for them in this community and how the school fit into that life.

Not surprisingly the answers varied widely depending on the circumstances of the individual. To many people the community represented a retirement home, while to others it was simply one community in a series of employment opportunities. To others the region was a home of great beauty and relative safety in contrast to more urban areas and their associated problems. In fact, several of the teachers we interviewed stated that they had moved from larger towns to this area, having known friends or relatives here, to get away from the confusion of the cities. The beauty of the region was a source of pride and satisfaction and was worth driving considerable distances on a daily basis to secure employment.

The student responses were just as mixed, ranging from satisfaction to dejection about the routine of rural life: "I do the same thing, go outside with my friends, and sit at home. No excitement any more. For the first couple of years it was alright." This sentiment was reiterated in several ways by another student, who said:

There is not a theater or movie house in Arcadia so usually the kids in Arcadia have parties for entertainment, or they have sports, that takes time. There's two cinemas

in Westfield. If you want to go shopping you have to go about 45 minutes to Northfork or Rivertown, so we get used to driving places if you want to go somewhere.

Not surprisingly the parents seemed less dissatisfied with their rural life:

...Course my wife and I like shows. We have to go to the city to buy our clothes and see a show or a movie. Of course we have cable TV they say life is a little slow compared to the city and I don't know if I agree with that...my boss, for example, lived on Long Island and it took him an hour and a half each end of the day to get to and from work. By the time you work 8 hours and travel 3, that's enough. It takes me two minutes to drive to work and then I've got that hour and half that I can do other things.

Life in these regions is family-oriented. Many of the parents interviewed talked about coaching little league baseball and doing things with their kids. The activities are familiar and similar in both communities:

We have three family swimming pools, ours is social place in the wintertime, as well as swimming in the summer. I don't swim that much, but we play cards and we have dinners and pass-a-plate card parties, as well as youth tournaments. In the wintertime we snowmobile and we'd eat there and go for rides. We have strong volleyball and horseshoe tournaments and that kind of thing.

In Arcadia parents talked about swimming pools, a community chorus, bowling, camping and skiing over at Appleville. For the older people in New Hope there are several social organizations, like ECHO and AARP, both of which allow people to get together for luncheons and socials. Arcadia has a similar set of organizations for their elderly citizens, such as the

Lions Club. New Hope has an Historical Society that is quite active and recently was part of the planning for New Hope' centennial celebrations. The president of the Historical Society has made a study of the one-room school houses in the area.

Cooperative Extension is another organization that is active in both communities. The 4-H club received special note from community members, and is an important part of the county fair which is held in Arcadia each year. Without belaboring the point, it is apparent that there are a large number of social organizations with which many of the community people identify. Obviously it cannot be assumed that everyone is equally involved.

These organizations are important because they represent standards for parents, and immediate source of socialization for children growing up. In this respect they can be thought of as an important part of the community members' identity. The schools contribute to that identity providing a forum for student activities. As one parent put it:

...the school is very much a part of the life of the community through the sports programs, the music programs...I know at the elementary school they put on productions and so on, play productions usually in the spring. I think if something were to happen to our school for whatever reason...it would be...a really devastating blow to the community.... the school is for your children and your children are your life.

Of course not all community members are as willing to ignore the potential costs associated with education. As one community member commented:

Education is number one, get a good education for the people, but at the same time you have got to take into consideration the cost that is going to come down to us...there are only three industries which fall into the school district and contribute to us with taxes... and the way that we are losing industries...I doubt very highly ...they will be here in another year and pay the taxes

The argument of community identity was especially frequent when people tried to describe the failure of the consolidation effort, and yet there was wide agreement that the two communities were very similar in character and stature. These assertions are probably best substantiated in this paper's demographic sections on population and the industrial base. Even though the students, parents and teachers all talked about the advantage of the small schools in terms of how supportive and "like a family" the school environment was, there still existed a reluctance to give up the notion of community identity, and many talked about the suspicion they had for the other village people.

One community member argued that the suspicion between the communities was as set as the feud between the Hatfields and McCoys: "The mentality is simply 'this is my turf and that is yours'... people just jump on one another..." One teacher said that he had discussed this topic in his classes, where the students made the distinction between the 'hats' and the 'nohats':

...you have many different spectrums of society, okay. You have the real rich kids, you have the preppies...in a school like ours - I talked to one of my classes about this - you have the hats and the no hats. Okay, the hats are the kids that wear bulldozer hats

and go to BOCES. The nohats wear the preppy clothes and don't go the BOCES. Within the town the professional people - druggist, banker, the doctor or lawyer - may watch out for the behavior of one of their own. But if one of the kids with the BOCES jackets gets into trouble, well that's to be expected of him, you know.

Generally there aren't too many organizations that cut across community lines. Each village has a grocery store, which according to one person is "over priced" as he went on to say, further:

... people from New Hope don't go down to Arcadia to shop because they have nothing more than we have here. If we go anywhere we go to Westfield or to Rivertown or Northfork. People from Arcadia head more towards Northfork and Westfield, but they don't come to New Hope to shop.

POLITICAL LIFE

The examination of political life in these communities helps identify previous fights over community action. The proposal to merge the two school districts caused a flurry of political reaction that was unusual for the district. One of the teachers in Arcadia, who has lived most of his life in the community, observed that: "...life is usually pretty quiet, and people are generally pretty conservative. " As another community member notes:

One of the political facts of working in a small town is that you have to live and work so closely with those who may oppose your ideas. If I'm a businessman or simply a friend in a social circle, that affects my political reactions. But the main issue is

still keeping taxes down, making sure there's very little tax increase.

The referendum for merging New Hope and Arcadia stimulated a tremendous amount of interest and debate among community members, and taxes were certainly a central issue. This concern about local taxes was not unprecedented. In New Hope, for example, the village is now considering a proposal for a new sewer system. Apparently the old system of septic tanks has not worked well, but there is disagreement about how to proceed.

The Village Board has proposed an innovative system in hopes of catching some of the federal dollars available for such changes. Much like the debate for school district the advantages are obvious. That is not to say, however, that the relative value of the proposal is of equal worth to all community members; not everyone is convinced of the worth of a new sewer system:

...we're right in the middle of [trying to replace] our sewer system right now and we're finding the same thing [compared to community reaction with consolidation]. Everybody will say we need a [new] system, but nobody wants this one we are proposing...we're going with an innovative system, and therefore we get 85 percent funding. If you go with a regular sewer system [you're in trouble] because they [the government] are not funding those anymore...And if we don't do this now maybe the next President will eliminate this kind of aid altogether... or who knows maybe this would all change and we would get 100 percent funding two years from now?

As this village leader notes the choice before the people of the community was not unlike that which they faced during the consolidation. Further, he comments:

...its the same people on the same side.. they're 55ish now, and they've lived here all their years, and their septic tanks have worked this long and they think they'll work alright for another ten, fifteen years and that's all they care about.

This argument is not unlike that of the citizens who have put their children through school, and now live on a fixed income, but continue to pay property tax. While the positive impact of a new sewer system (or even the proposed district merger) on the community as a whole may seem obvious, it is much harder to argue that "older taxpayers would benefit greatly from such changes."

The argument about taxes is really too simple to explain the rejection of the proposed new sewer system. Another part of the problem is the uncertainty about the cost of the system in the future. The community's historian makes these comments:

The big thing is the cost. When the sewer issue was first beginning two or three years ago, the mayor at that time, he and I were discussing over coffee one morning about the sewer issue, and his bottom line comment to me was that if the State, or someone, were to put this system in, free of charge, the village of New Hope couldn't afford to operate it.

Further, there is doubt in the minds of some of the citizens that the system would work:

So to put in a system, with the quicksand problem, where land moves, it moves all the time and you'll see it as you come in to the village from the North, and as you go out East, the highways are cracked...so the sewer pipes would be a problem. It is my opinion... you're not going to put the thing in hopefully completely wrong because you don't

want to dig it up and do it over again in another year's time.

We were curious about why the community was so suspicious of the State-aided plans for both the consolidation and the new sewer system. A member of the Concerned Citizens responded:

I guess on the face of it they [State aid programs reducing the cost] should be persuasive arguments, but so many times those kind of statements aren't really born out in truth. And I think this is, that people just have in the back of their minds this sort of thing...But, still, the main complaint that we keep hearing on this [sewer or consolidation] is what are we going to get for our tax dollar?.

The concern about taxes is just as prominent in Arcadia where the library and fire department had to resort to charity drives in order to finance new buildings:

...we really haven't had to vote on a public building here since the town hall and the village hall were built in the 1930's. The volunteer fire department had to build its own building, they raised money with public projects and loans from the bank. The library is endowed with a lot of money, I guess, and they raised some money around their own library building.

The important point here is that like the reorganization debate, citizens were primarily concerned about the relative benefit of community improvements such as sewer systems and fire truck houses. Unlike the reorganization debate the issues were not cloaked in a controversy about community identity. The similarities are important because they help clarify an important point. There is a distinction between the public good and the private interest. People can recognize that a fire truck house

or a new sewer or a school improvement are for the public good. But, if you are 55 and on a fixed income, or if you are only working in the village for a few years before moving on, or if you are not likely to benefit directly from the changes, then one can quite rationally reject the improvement. Recognizing these differences exist among the interests of segments within the community helps to explain why the reorganization referendum was defeated.

Debate and citizen participation are certainly worthwhile, even fundamental ideals, but a more careful consideration of the incentives being offered the various community members, and more clarity about future uncertainties are necessary ingredients to gaining acceptance of these public service issues.

DEMOGRAPHICS

One of explanations for the failure of the reorganization referendum was that both communities' were composed largely of older and poorer people, who were on fixed incomes and concerned about the possibility of increased taxes in the future. A Second explanation for the defeat was that those who rejected the consolidation referendum did so because they felt that Arcadia was a poor school district that had every thing to gain by the merger, and that New Hope had nothing to gain but Arcadia's problems. We examined these explanations by measuring the relevant wealth and age characteristics of the two districts.

First, however, we outline the demographic characteristics of the county, to establish context.

The County. Both New Hope and Arcadia School Districts are in New Hope County. The county has had a slowly increasing population since the 1960's: 80,000 to 86,000. Olea is the largest city in the county with just over 18,200 people. The median income was, in 1980, \$16,891. The manufacturing economic base has been declining slightly, with 30 percent of the 1980 work force in manufacturing. The number of farms and the total acreage has been reduced by over half since the early '50s. In 1980, about 64 percent of the work force was employed in the service sector. The unemployment rate was about 9 percent, with a high poverty rate of about 16 percent. The population is a relatively old one with 20 percent over 60 years old (Eberts, 1984).

The School Districts. The two districts are not very different in their demographic characteristics. New Hope is the larger of the two school districts, including 125 square miles and a population of 4176. The population density of the school district is about 33.4 people/sq mile. Arcadia's population is 2625 people in 89 square miles, its population density is about 29.5 people/sq mile. While the total population of each of these school districts has remained relatively constant, the school enrollments have declined steadily.

Student Enrollments. Both schools have lost a large percentage of their students over the years. In 1970 New hope

enrolled 1032 students and Arcadia 705. By 1982 New Hope enrolled only 846 and Arcadia 532. The average decline between the years 1970 and 1980 in the enrollments of the two school districts was 21.2 percent. The table below contrasts the two districts:

-New Hope: average loss 18.0%

-Elementary: 12.3% loss

-High school: 19.5% loss

-Arcadia: average loss 25.8%

-Elementary: 20.8% loss

-High school: 31.2% loss

The loss of students has been especially difficult for school administrators in Arcadia, because even with a reduced student population the school must offer the same number of courses. While this problem did lead school officials to consider reorganization, it does not necessarily mean that the district was in a state of decline. When we compared the two schools' course curriculum and the experience of the teaching staff we found the evidence presented earlier that Arcadia has its strengths and would not simply offer New Hope its problems.

Age Characteristics. The districts have been described by the community members as one with a high proportion of older folks. The 1980 census figures indicate, however, that in both districts just 16 percent of the population was over 60 years old, and 42 percent of the population is 25 to 59 years old. The age demographics for the two districts were almost identical. Neither district had significantly more older people than the

county average. Both district had fewer young people, about 42 percent of the population is under 25 years old, than the State average of over 50 percent.

Mobility Characteristics. The population in New Hope is slightly more stable than that of Arcadia. Between 1975 and 1980 only 33 percent of the people changed residences as compared to 40 percent of the people in Arcadia. Of those people that did move less than 20 percent of them moved out of the county. Another way of looking at the mobility of the work force is by reporting the place of work. In both districts over 73 percent of those working do so within the county of residence. Workers in Arcadia do not travel as far to work as do workers in New Hope, with about 50 percent working within 15 minutes of home in Arcadia compared to 37 percent in New Hope. New Hope has, proportionately, about twice as many workers traveling over an hour to work: about 9 percent of its work force.

Income Characteristics. The income characteristics of the districts can be summarized as follows. The median family income for New Hope is \$15,807. Of the 1133 families in the district, only 142 have incomes above \$30,000, or 12.5 percent. There are 113 families below the poverty level, just less than 10 percent.

The median income for a family in Arcadia is \$15,434. There are 661 families in Arcadia, and only 41, or 6.2 percent, earn over \$30,000. About 11 percent, or 73 families, are below the poverty line. Generally, the differences between the two districts are minimal. New Hope has a few more families that are

comparatively well than Arcadia. Both districts have fewer families below the poverty line than the county average of about 16 per cent.

The employment comparison is best made by the following table, the results show that the two district have only minor variations in employment patterns. The largest single area of employment is obviously industrial sector:

AREAS OF EMPLOYMENT

	Arcadia	New Hope
ag/forest/etc.	3.7%	12.4%
construction	7.1	5.8
manufacturing	30.7	29.7
transportation	3.4	2.9
communications/public utilities	1.7	1.3
whole sale trade	3.3	2.1
retail trade	14.5	10.6
finance/insurance/real estate	5.1	2.2
business and repair services	3.0	1.7
entertainment/ recreation services	3.5	2.5
health services	5.6	13.1
educational services	7.8	8.6
professional and related services	3.2	3.7
public administration	7.7	3.7

District Wealth Characteristics. Neither New Hope nor Arcadia are wealthy school districts. The property wealth of both districts is in the second lowest quartile for the State. New Hope in the lowest quartile for expenditure per pupil and spends less than does Arcadia. The following table outlines the comparison:

WEALTH CHARACTERISTICS (1985)

	Arcadia	New Hope
property wealth per pupil	\$65,019.0	\$57,474
quartile property wealth/pupil	second lowest	second lowest
income per pupil	\$20,030	\$19,122
quartile income wealth/pupil	lowest	lowest
expenditure per pupil	\$3,657	\$3,306
quartile exp/pupil	second lowest	lowest
composite wealth/pupil	0.59766	0.54448
quartile composite wealth	second lowest	lowest

Returning to our original questions, some answers can be offered. First the demographic characteristics of the two districts are very similar. Both districts are, comparatively poor. Many of the New Hope opponents to reorganization had argued that a merger with Arcadia would gain them nothing Arcadia's problems. Certainly Arcadia had problems, but notice that the district had a larger composite wealth figure than did New Hope. Further, taxpayers in Arcadia spent more per pupil than did taxpayers in New Hope. Contrary to the argument that Arcadia had nothing but problems to offer the resident tax payers of New Hope, Arcadia actually has a larger tax base, and spent more per pupil on education than did the school district in New Hope.

THE ECONOMIC/INDUSTRIAL BASE

This section will help us understand several important aspects of life in these two communities. We will see that there has been a steady change in the employment opportunities of the

people living in this area. Contrary to the popular notion that life in rural communities is unchanging, people in Arcadia and New Hope have had to cope with major changes in employment opportunities over the years. With this in mind it will be easier to appreciate the observation made by many community members that the community is divided between those families seeking immediate employment opportunities and those who live permanently in the community.

Recall that most of the people in the region are long term residents; approximately 60 percent lived in the same house 10 years ago. The other 40 percent represent people who have moved during the last 10 years. Not all of these people have moved out of the area, but the facts illustrate the mobility patterns of rural people. It is instructive to note that over 50 percent of the workers in the area travel over 30 minutes to work. The teachers are a good example. Over 60 percent of them live outside of the villages in which the schools are situated, and about 45 percent live outside of the school district proper.

These facts help us understand why the community participation model used in the effort to reorganize the two school districts was not able to manage to hold the whole community to a single purpose. To a large extent the community participation plan addressed itself to the community as if the entire community had a single interest in the quality of the schools. The point is that the single minded conception of community instituted in the reorganization plan misrepresented

the complexity of the situation and alienated rather than included a large segment of the community.

INDUSTRIAL HISTORY OF THE AREA

The areas of Arcadia and New Hope School Districts have never been exclusively agricultural, at least in recent history. During the last 30 to 40 years there has been a steady transition from an agriculture to manufacturing. Since 1950 over half of the farm land, mostly dairy farms, has been given up for some other purpose. This forced the Borden milk processing plant to close down in the early 1960's. Before World War II there were 3 cutlery businesses in the area, providing employment for workers in both Arcadia and New Hope. All 3 of these businesses closed in the early 1960's, as they were unable to modernize quickly enough to compete with the German imports. These businesses had offered the area a stable economic base, but according to one community member

...since that time we haven't had any real stable industry here. Small ones coming and going, you know they start up and then they move or consolidate or something.

Arcadia. The largest and most consistent employer in the Arcadia district has been the county itself. The county seat includes the court house, the police as well as highway repair workers. Like New hope, the largest proportion of the area's residents work in some industrial business (30 percent). The

change in these industries is best illustrated in the example of the Sayer Brothers.

The Sayer Brothers's business began as a manufacturer of bathroom fixtures, chrome plating, and used to employ a large number of people. It grew over the years and changed. Now the business constructs furniture, mostly tables and stands covered with plastic material. Sayer Brothers used to have several shops around the area. Recently, in 1982, the owners decided to consolidate their shops into a central building. They moved to nearby Fallner. The company continues to employ workers from the Arcadia area, busing them to and from the work place in Fallner.

The changes in the industrial base have been unpredictable. Economic conditions have force many small businesses to make changes in their services, such as one automobile parts manufacturer who began constructing windows. Most, however, are forced to consolidate with other businesses or close shop altogether. This has had a profound effect on the population in Arcadia. Many people move in or out of the area depending on the economic opportunities, while another proportion of the population has lived steadily in the area.

New Hope. The changes in the industrial base of New Hope are similar to those of Arcadia. Businesses have come and gone. Some have changed the kind of service they offer in order to stay in business. Dillon Jonsen, once a dairy processor, is now a refrigeration business. Others have reduced their working force, or consolidated with other companies in order to survive. Sumer

Box, for example, a division of a larger national corporation, once employed over 200 people but now employs fewer than 50 .

Most of these businesses were locally owned at one time, but no longer. Virtually all of them have been consolidated with larger companies in the area, or have been bought out by national corporations. In the late 60's Sumer Brothers, for example, was bought out by United Plywood Company and then subsequently by BONCO situated in Texas. Turner Industries was another large industrial business in the area, but it recently consolidated its operation under a new 11 million dollar building near Boston. The company used to hire over 150 workers, including a number of machinists. Now there are less than 30 employed constructing garage door openers. All the machinists have been laid off and machine work is sent up to a large nearby city.

The lose of businesses has not been confined to the large industries. The New Hope village historian notes that over the last few decades many industries and small businesses have left the area: sawmills, gristmills, cheese factories, Scholl's Meat Market, Alice's Restaurant, Carnation Milk Plant, and the New Hope Times, just to name a few. According to one community member, "We have, you know, people who live here and work outside the community, there's just not a lot of work in the community ...you've got people driving in to work here and we have people driving out to work other places." The end result has been a steady migration of workers, in and out of both towns, depending on the state of the local economy.

Not all business is disappearing. An interesting anecdote has to do with the loss of the Lake-Backawanna railroad. In 1970 the county took over the tracks for back taxes. A local business man bought the rights and now services the local industries. For example, Sumer Box receives about 7 box cars of paper every week. Without this rail service the industries would have to rely on trucking, which would be considerably more expensive. The Sumer Box manager said that it would take the equivalent of 20 trucks to match the rail service. Further, the problem with using trucks is that each has to be unloaded immediately, were the rail cars be unloaded as the paper is needed.

This review of the history and current situation of industry in the Arcadia and New Hope region has offered several important perspectives about the people and their lives. First, and most obviously, the people in this region are not primarily farmers. As we have seen from the description in the section on demographics, workers find a diverse set of employment opportunities. A changing industrial situation employs about 30 percent of the workers. As businesses begin and fail, people in search of employment opportunities have moved into the area and have left. The result has been a very mobile work force. The mobility of these workers makes it difficult to argue that the community citizens, of New Hope and Arcadia, were suspicious of one another. It is not as if they had never encountered strangers.

The argument that community members rejected the reorganization of the school districts for fear of losing their community identity is severely weakened when one realizes that several community industries have been consolidated and reorganized in order to survive. Schools may be an important source of community identity, but it is hard to argue that a communities economic base is not. It may be that the image of community identity is a good rallying call against the proposition of school district reorganization, but reasons of taxes and questions about likely implications of school district reorganization loom much larger as possible explanation for the rejection in this case.

This argument becomes much more plausible when one considers the effects of mobility on the population in the communities. According to one life time resident, the towns are being transformed as the new settlers replace the old timers. In fact, this individual noted that fewer than 6 of his high school classmates still live in the region:

We're getting now a transition, we're getting newer people in, and older families that raised their children... their sons and daughters do not tend to come back, so you get a transition of the older local families out of the community...and newer families are moving in.

These circumstances have implications for school district reorganization because of the diverse interests of people pursuing different opportunities. The families moving in and out of the area are not just from those working in the industries.

Many of the families are professionals: bankers, administrators, and teachers. These families have the means of coping with the possible economic risks that were associated with the reorganization plan.

Families of professional workers are the ones most likely to move on to more urban areas. These parents could be quite rightfully concerned about the preparation their children are receiving in a smaller school district, and how it will affect future opportunities. Further, parents who will move out of the area will not be faced with long term uncertainty about the direction of taxes, after the State incentive aid ends.

When we think of the community in these terms it becomes apparent that a single minded conception of the community is too weak an idea to cope with the complexities of school district reorganization. We have identified several factions of the communities: young and older tax payers; professional and industrial workers; short time residents and long term residents. Thinking of the community in these terms helps identify the vested interests and the competing issues that led to the fractious debate over reorganization in Arcadia and New Hope.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this case study has been to consider why the community members of New Hope and Arcadia reacted so strongly against the referendum for school district reorganization in

February of 1983. State and local school officials had introduced into this reorganization effort a unique plan designed to achieve community support for the merger, a plan which we called the Community Participation Plan. Rather than have the State conduct the feasibility study for the merger, the Community Participation Plan organized community members into committees, each of which studied one aspect of the proposed reorganization. Despite the unanimous support of all 10 community based committees for the planned reorganization, the citizens of Arcadia and New Hope school districts overwhelmingly rejected the referendum for it.

The argument for reorganizing these two districts was based on the proposition that a merger would provide students with more opportunities and a better education. However, many of the citizens of the two communities were not convinced that the existing schools were inadequate. Further, while it was generally recognized that reorganization would improve opportunities for some students, many parents and community members rejected the merger bid because it was unlikely to affect their children's opportunities. Finally, citizens were very wary of the future consequences of the reorganization. This was a significant problem since the details of the reorganization were to be determined after the vote.

The results of this study suggest that community members were neither convinced that their school districts were inadequate nor that reorganizing their districts would lead to

important new opportunities for large numbers of students. The decision to reject the reorganization bid appeared to have less to do with the issues of community identity and more to do with the costs and benefits of the opportunities. The result was that many community members recognized that a reorganization would in fact lead to improved opportunities for some students, but still refused to support it because it had little to offer their particular interests.

The use of the Community Participation Plan was prompted by the belief that communities reject reorganization when they are not involved with the decision making. Involvement with studying the problems first hand, and ownership of the decision to plan the reorganization referendum was believed to be sufficient to overcome the reluctance of communities to reorganize their schools. The reform of these procedural matters failed in Arcadia and New Hope to address the varied and substantive concerns raised by different groups within the communities. The reorganization proposition had very different implications for one group compared to another. Contrary to what the State expected, the more the groups within the community discussed and debated the reorganization proposition, the less possible it was for agreement to be reached. There are two possible conclusions: (1) Reorganizations because they are so intently divisive ought to be handled quickly with a minimum of discussion and citizen involvement; or (2) the case for reorganization is not so compelling as its advocates would have us believe and that the

State should pursue a more balanced role in trying to improve the educational opportunities for children in rural areas. We are inclined to endorse the second conclusion.

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